

ben hall

painting and printmaking (year three)

for margaret salmon

image / performance / sound / montage: foundations of film as text

3649 words

forgetting to watch; the validity of the presentational

It seems counterintuitive to shatter your audiences' collective suspension of disbelief in order to more powerfully impress your theatre upon them, but for millennia many dramatists have persisted in doing just that. Engaging your audience as active participants, breaking the *fourth wall*, emphasising formal elements above all else; this category of drama is commonly bundled as *presentational theatre* and in the looseness of this definition has coolly pervaded international creative expression. The growth in appreciation (and codification) of theatrical semiotics in the 20th century has led to the adoption of presentational theatre's tenets by a plethora of creators but also has created a broad debate. Namely, that presentationally structured arts are obtuse, elitist, ill-informed and purposefully abused by their proponents to high-handed ends. I have selected texts originating from key practitioners of differing disciplines surrounding the style and cultural critics able to write more retrospectively in order to illustrate sides of this debate. Have presentational theatre and its offspring earned their prestige, or are they just the stylings of snobs with agenda to force?

When discussing the debate around contemporaneous presentational arts it makes sense to start constructively. Bertolt Brecht, visionary German playwright and passionate Marxist, has come to be seen as one of the most significant dramatists of the 20th century and the chief practitioner of that century's presentational theatre. Throughout his career he virulently built the case for his new, socially biting *Epic Theatre*, and his popular essay *On Chinese Acting*¹ exemplifies this in its analysis of one of Brecht's key references. When viewing the simulacrum 'Chinese actor'² of the piece, an individual 'is not the spectator but his neighbour'³ - or more literally - the Chinese actor 'never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him... He expresses his awareness of being watched.'⁴ Brecht's Chinese actor 'sees himself and his performance as alien'⁵ and in doing so 'hinders the audience from simply identifying itself with the characters of the play.'⁶ Brecht uses his widely adopted term *verfremdungseffekt* (usually translated as *alienation* or *distancing effect*) here; his Chinese actor 'eschews complete transformation'⁷ and in doing so unshackles his audience from representational modes of understanding, forcing understanding of his 'actions and utterances to take place on a conscious plane.'⁸

So far Brecht's focus has been limited to explaining his observations of the semiotic implications of traditional Chinese theatrical methods. His 'exoticised, poorly educated'⁹ account of Chinese theatre rests on classically Eurocentric grounds - using broad strokes to generalise and *other* the Asiatic. Brecht is not seeing *verfremdungseffekt* in Chinese acting but instead superimposing it upon styles he does not fully understand. His harshest critics go so far as to claim Brecht 'managed to look knowing without appearing to know anything.'¹⁰ In light of my own recent experience of the rigorous stylings of Japanese

¹ Brecht, B. and Willet, J. *Brecht on Theatre; the development of an aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Leitman, H. *Brecht, Chinese Acting, Exoticism and Mei Lanfang* (Australia, 2013)

<https://studylib.net/doc/9534215/brecht--chinese-acting--exoticism--and-mei-lanfang> [Accessed 10/2/19]

¹⁰ Cohen, N. *Time for curtain to fall on Brecht* (United Kingdom, 2008)

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/may/18/politicaltheatre.theatre> [Accessed 10/2/19]

kabuki theatre at Ginza Kabukiza, Tokyo,¹¹ Brecht's account of the formal 'minimum of illusion'¹² prevalent in traditional South East Asian performing arts holds some semiotic water, but in terms of ethnography and cultural study his account is worthless. He goes so far as to use the German word for 'alien'¹³ in describing Chinese theatre; the dangerous implications of word choices like this are inescapable in this text. However despite its xenophobic misapplication in this case the concept of *verfremdungseffekt* remains an impressive one. In widening the lens of his meditations to bring presentational theatre into the arena with representational Western acting Brecht makes *On Chinese Acting* a more novel piece, but his methods become more flagrantly subjective and his tone more derogatory.

Before analysing this trend in *On Chinese Acting* it is important to understand the strawman 'Western actor'¹⁴ Brecht sketches; he makes no attempt to hide the model for his caricature. Brecht references the seminal Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski by name, stating that his contemporary would be given 'a lot of trouble'¹⁵ by the 'necessary operation of examining the truth of [the Chinese actor's] performance.'¹⁶ It is true that in many places Stanislavski's representational method runs near directly counter to Brecht's presentational Epic Theatre, as evidenced in the second chapter of the former's part-novel part-handbook *An Actor Prepares*;¹⁷ entitled *When Acting Is an Art*. Like Brecht, Stanislavski is attempting to assert his preferred acting practice as the ultimate form of theatrical semiotics; in his words 'only [his] kind of art... can artistically reproduce the impalpable shadings and depths of life.'¹⁸ Stanislavski's system is vastly more romantic than Brecht's, based on 'completely absorbing the spectator,'¹⁹ allowing audiences to 'inwardly experience the happenings on the stage'²⁰ as opposed to persistently trying to pull them out of any state of immersion. Stanislavski tiers his perceived styles of acting by their artistic worth, topping the list with his own 'living the role'²¹ and moving downwards through descriptions of 'the art of representation'²² (which is deemed 'sharp but not lasting'²³) and 'mechanical acting.'²⁴ The latter is that closest to a Brechtian mode of expression and Stanislavski decries it as 'offering nothing but a dead mask of non-existent feeling'²⁵ comprised of 'established clichés.'²⁶

Issues of provenance in *When Acting Is an Art* and *On Chinese Acting* become most evident when placed parallel to one and other, especially as both take the form of pseudo-treatises. Stanislavski and Brecht were perhaps the two preeminent revolutionaries of 20th century theatre, and their twin uncompromising drives toward new ground and new schools of thought goes a way to explaining their blinkered convictions that their methods were the best around. To illustrate this, one of Brecht's ex-lovers

¹¹ *February at Kabukiza Theatre* (Tokyo, 2019) [Dance Performance]

https://www.kabukiweb.net/theatres/kabukiza/performance/february_1.html

¹² Brecht, B. and Willet, J. *Brecht on Theatre; the development of an aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964)

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ Stanislavski, K. *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1936)

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

described him as ‘a Dompteur (breaker of wild beasts)... a man who was used to getting totally his own way.’²⁷ As one of the first holders of the title *People’s Artist of the USSR*²⁸ Stanislavski was little different. In such a self-assured manner his hierarchy of acting styles fails to account for a truly presentational mode of expression; *mechanical acting* and *the art of representation* share many practical elements with Brecht’s Chinese actor but neither appreciate a desire to wantonly distance audiences from events onstage. Use of the *verfremdungseffekt* and structurally obsessed theatre was budding in Europe at the time but *When Acting Is an Art* assumes representational theatre is theatre’s only form, or at least the only one worth mentioning. Stanislavski’s ‘Aristotelian theatre’²⁹ also commits the most basic of philosophical assumptions; the Naturalistic Fallacy. Being ‘natural’³⁰ and ‘commonsensical’³¹ are repeatedly posited as the measures of quality whereas ‘breaking the laws of normal organic life’³² is to be avoided. Similarly, the standard of being ‘artistic’³³ is regularly ascribed to *When Acting Is an Art*’s characters. Stanislavski is appealing to his audience’s romanticism, their humanist intuition, their *heart*; trying to persuade through emotion and escapism. His methods and values are clear but refutable (perhaps even emotionally manipulative) and they leave *When Acting Is an Art* reading as a pragmatic and seductive opinion piece. The text’s immeasurable impact is unsurprising, even if in the context of a century of semiotic boundary pushing it seems reductively quaint.

Unlike Stanislavski’s piece, *On Chinese Acting* repeatedly references its opposition - unsurprising considering the thrust of Brecht’s career. His Marxist ‘belief framework’³⁴ painted Brecht as the underdog, speaking out against the bourgeoisie on behalf of the proletariat. He tooled Epic Theatre to ‘contribute to the great social task of mastering life’³⁵ by ‘revealing the contradictions in bourgeois society.’³⁶ For example; the *verfremdungseffekt* in ‘the performers’ attitude confers fame’³⁷ onto the historified events of the given play. By forcing audiences to engage with material on a ‘conscious plane’³⁸ Brecht ‘calls forth the spectator’³⁹ and in doing so ‘submitted [his material] to the approval of the audience.’⁴⁰ In wresting control of public approval and historification from the bourgeoisie Brecht sought to move social thought away from the dichotomy he saw at its centre - ‘history for the milieu but not for man’⁴¹ - and liberate the proletariat from the image of the unchanging ‘Eternally Human’⁴² imposed upon them. Such a convicted firebrand ideology often rests on manyfold assumptions and Brecht’s Marxism is no different. These are

²⁷ Fuegi, J. *Brecht & Co.: Sex, Politics and the Making of the Modern Drama* (New York: Grove Press, 2002)

²⁸ Magarshack, D. *Stanislavski On The Art Of The Stage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950)

²⁹ Francies, C. *Reality as construct: representation and meaning in post-modernist theatre with special reference to the works of Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht* (Kerala: University of Calicut, 2003)

³⁰ Stanislavski, K. *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1936) aap

³¹ Francies, C. *Reality as construct: representation and meaning in post-modernist theatre with special reference to the works of Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht* (Kerala: University of Calicut, 2003)

³² Stanislavski, K. *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1936) aap

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Coates, J. *Exploring Brecht’s Beliefs, Creativity* (United States, 1991)

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-07-18-9103200540-story.html> [Accessed 11/2/19]

³⁵ Brecht, B. and Willet, J. *Brecht on Theatre; the development of an aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964)

³⁶ Francies, C. *Reality as construct: representation and meaning in post-modernist theatre with special reference to the works of Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht* (Kerala: University of Calicut, 2003)

³⁷ Brecht, B. and Willet, J. *Brecht on Theatre; the development of an aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

laid bare in *On Chinese Acting*, the challenge being to accept them or to stop reading: all art should try to 'contribute to the great task. It seems possible and necessary to rebuild society. Everything must be seen from the social standpoint.'⁴³ While presented as a moral imperative Brecht's text is a scathing opinion piece; he becomes dismissive and his social attack on Stanislavskian representation is unfavourably inflected by the wider context of Brecht's agenda. 'Isn't art sacrosanct?'⁴⁴ he mocks, concluding that 'Asiatic acting shows us how deeply parsonic our art still is,'⁴⁵ but his poor understanding of Chinese theatre renders the statement unauthoritative. When Brecht calls his presentational Epic Theatre 'a creative process of a higher sort'⁴⁶ and claims it 'calls for a considerable general intelligence'⁴⁷ of audiences it sounds not like a Marxist theatre of the people but a theatre of the intellectual elite. Even Brecht's close friend and collaborator Eric Bentley described him as 'bottomlessly bourgeois'⁴⁸ and would 'spare no expense to look poor'⁴⁹ to counteract this. Bentley uses a Søren Kierkegaard quote to illustrate Brecht's duality; 'what we believe we disbelieve and cannot rid ourselves of that which we condemn.'⁵⁰ Later in the same article a Friedrich Nietzsche quote is also retooled in this fashion; Brecht was an 'idealist from the vicinity of a swamp.'⁵¹ Brecht is preaching to the proletariat's rationality and sense of civic impetus but without an appreciation of the spectrum of challenges that faced the 20th century working classes when it came to increasingly abstract philosophies being enacted upon them. A devout Brechtian could argue Brecht is not insulting the moral intellect of the masses but instead seeking to encourage and empower them to be more scrutinous of figures like Walter Ulbricht. Essentially, the proletariat becoming aware of their chains in the classic Marxist fashion, but the testimonies of those close to him run counter to this narrative. Perhaps the epitome of Brecht's hypocritic 'fivefold'⁵² nature relating to the target audience of *On Chinese Acting* is in his decision to work under and accept money from Ulbricht's 'corrupt post-war East German regime'⁵³ while deluding himself he 'could provide inner opposition'⁵⁴ to the bastardisation of his Marxism within the Soviet Bloc. When deepening an enquiry into *On Chinese Acting*, its description of *verfremdungseffekt* remains illuminating but its ethnographic and socialist foundation destabilise the effectiveness of its case for the superiority of presentational theatre over that of Stanislavski, Aristotle and the bourgeoisie.

If *When Acting Is an Art* and *On Chinese Acting* are fiercely novel (if still speculative and self-congratulatory) case studies on presentational expression, then Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*⁵⁵ is the textbook. As a prolific British academic⁵⁶ publishing in 1980, Elam was afforded a modicum of distance from much of his source material Brecht and Stanislavski's texts were not, and

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Coates, J. *Exploring Brecht's Beliefs, Creativity* (United States, 1991)

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-07-18-9103200540-story.html> [Accessed 11/2/19]

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Billington, M. *B is for Brecht* (United Kingdom, 2011)

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/dec/21/bertolt-brecht-a-z-modern-drama> [Accessed: 10/2/19]

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980)

⁵⁶ University of Bologna. *Keir Douglas Elam Curriculum Vitae* (Italy, 2019)

<https://www.unibo.it/sitoweb/keirdouglas.elam/cv-en> [Accessed 17/2/19]

combined with the 'wide-open angle of his approach'⁵⁷ this allows *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* to take on a tone of comprehensiveness. So exhaustive is Elam's approach that in 1981 reviewer Jean Alter already saw his book as the answer to the previously difficult question 'where can I really learn about the semiotics of theatre?'⁵⁸ - less than a year after its publication. Alter introduces the text as one 'which opens a new field for the public at large... the first of its scope in English'⁵⁹ and Elam clearly invites this accolade. He notes the considerable lack of semiotic 'attention'⁶⁰ received by theatre and drama in his opening paragraph, elaborating upon the field's (as yet) 'still largely undefined nature.'⁶¹ The fact that in selecting referential examples his 'chief criterion was that of familiarity'⁶² is telling; in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* Elam consciously strove to write a gateway text palatable to an audience of a breadth unprecedented in theatrical semiotics study. In this sense, while clearly a vastly different type of text than *When Acting Is an Art*, Elam's book shares some of Stanislavski's aspirations toward seminality; a sense of school-building. Furthermore the book is an easily digestible couple of hundred pages⁶³ (without reading lists and indexes) and Elam semi-seriously apologises for the 'disproportionate number of references to Shakespeare'⁶⁴ with just a hint of ruefulness. These observations draw a narrative of an expert in theatrical semiotics sensing a gap in the market and capitalising, exegesing his wealth of knowledge to not just an academic audience versed in semiotics but a wider community of theatre-goers. Such a narrative should not be read as overly cynical; Alter thought *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* a cause for 'great rejoicing'⁶⁵ and I found it a greatly informative jumping-off point into stage semiotics. Where Brecht merely spoke of empowering a wide group while remaining unwilling to reach out to them, Elam actually presents his unit of knowledge in a consumable language and form. Admittedly Brecht's potential audience was orders of magnitude larger and more diverse than Elam's, but the generosity of Elam's writing is commendable. Contrary to some of Brecht's least humanistic beliefs, there is nothing wrong with media pitched with respect to those with limited understanding of the territory. Elam writes 'clearly and honestly'⁶⁶ with 'lucid explanation... careful weighing and illustrations abound.'⁶⁷ The opening section evidences this succinctly; the three titular terms are defined with great eloquence. The passage explicitly focused on presentational theatre, *The theatrical frame: transactional and interactional conventions*,⁶⁸ is similarly useful; concepts such as 'the disattendance factor'⁶⁹ and 'verisimilitude'⁷⁰ in relation to the structured 'theatrical frame'⁷¹ are carefully spelled out. Upon the above judgements alone, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* stands as an valuable enterprise and a generous entrance text on presentational theatre, encompassing both Brechtian and Stanislavskian traditions and containing an 'eclectic'⁷² and comprehensive range of examples and further reading.

⁵⁷ Alter, J. *Review: The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama by Elam, Keir* in *Poetics Today* 2(3) (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1981)

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980)

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Alter, J. *Review: The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama by Elam, Keir* in *Poetics Today* 2(3) (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1981)

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980)

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

It is in fact in this eclecticism that Elam falters slightly; moving from his 'sophisticated pattern'⁷³ of rigorous informativeness to 'undoubtedly uneven'⁷⁴ tangents, even by his own admission. Elam sees this wonkiness as 'perhaps symptomatic of the present state of semiotics at large,'⁷⁵ which makes the initial codified familiarity of his method seem all the more commonsensical if not necessary to make *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* in any way approachable. The usefulness of Elam's text truly begins to sway when it becomes more holistic in its approach; the scope of his enquiry dramatically increases to include concepts outside of a strict semiotician's remit (such as 'recent linguistic and sociological research'⁷⁶). This 'liberalism (or imperialism) disturbs'⁷⁷ Alter, who finds this highly integrated style 'weak and not applicable'⁷⁸ to the major thrust of the text. These peripherals only really serve as distractions from the core of *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*; it is not a focused, tight opinion piece such as *On Chinese Acting* and in its format such liberties are to be expected. To this end, many of Elam's conclusions rest on Occam's razor; in line with his desire for digestibility and clarity of understanding he founds his study on the definition of semiotics as 'dedicated to the production of meaning in society.'⁷⁹ It would be unfair to criticise Elam too harshly for this as such a general assumption is more than serviceable, but it would also be unwise to reference *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* in isolation for any narrow, complex study - the further reading in its indexes would be more appropriate. To Elam's credit he is forward-looking in his over-inclusiveness; alluding to grounds for 'future research'⁸⁰ and an overdue new general theory of theatre. The provenance of the text is one of mixed blessings; Elam's approach and motive mean the content of the book is still useful almost 40 years after publication but also that it is not a full, authoritative representation of the majority of its foci.

One such focus is pertinent in that it illustrates the comprehensive connectedness of *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* specifically in relation to presentational theatre and with great relevance to structuralist media as a whole. To use a longform quotation;

'The general connotative marker 'theatricality' attaches to the entire performance and to its every element—as Brecht, Handke and many others have been anxious to underline— permitting the audience to 'bracket off' what is presented to them from normal social praxis and so perceive the performance as a network of meanings, i.e. as a text.'⁸¹

If one replaces the term *theatricality* with an adjective specific to any media (or a generality such as *art*) then Elam's conclusion (and key use of the word *text*) is revealing as to the value of a presentational form. The original statement clearly applies to Brecht, but for another example substituting *filmic* renders it seamlessly applicable to any number of structuralist filmmakers, such as Hollis Frampton

⁷³ Alter, J. *Review: The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama by Elam, Keir* in *Poetics Today* 2(3) (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1981)

⁷⁴ Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980)

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ Alter, J. *Review: The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama by Elam, Keir* in *Poetics Today* 2(3) (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1981)

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

⁷⁹ Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980)

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

⁸¹ *Ibid*

or Ed Atkins. In the case of Irish-American writer Gilbert Sorrentino's novel *Mulligan Stew*⁸² appropriate substitutes could be *literary*, *parodic* or *prosaic*, as illustrated in Jaye Berman Montresor's essay *Gilbert Sorrentino: At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool*.⁸³ Montresor's explicit aim is to 'explore the intertextual indebtedness of *Mulligan Stew* to two novels by [its] Irish "ancestors,"'⁸⁴ namely James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*⁸⁵ and Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*,⁸⁶ and succinctly assessing these three novels in tandem with Montresor's essay is revealing of the latter's provenance. Firstly, Montresor's tonal approach has clear subtextual differences from that in Brecht, Stanislavski and Elam's texts. As an essay published in small scale academic journal, far removed from its source material (published 1993, with Joyce and O'Brien in 1939 and Sorrentino in 1979), *At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* has no allusions to becoming a foundational text for anything; in fact Montresor's enquiry is heavily precedented in *Mulligan Stew* itself. Sorrentino borrows literal characters from his ancestors' novels; Clive Sollis⁸⁷ is from the pages of *Finnegan's Wake* and Dermot Trellis⁸⁸ from *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Joyce and O'Brien are incessantly referred to by name and Sorrentino later wrote that '*Mulligan Stew* is not truly intelligible unless it is seen as dependent on the work of Joyce and Flann O'Brien.'⁸⁹ As well as being significant in a reading of *Mulligan Stew*, this shows that the thrust of Montresor's essay is as far from novel as can be. His is certainly not a text trying to break ground as *When Acting Is an Art* was, but explaining and compounding upon self-evident connections, woven into a compelling whole. In this sense his motives are more in line with Elam's; drawing thoughtful insight for a known quantity hitherto lacking a *textbook*, synthesising myriad sources on the subject into a cogent whole. However, Montresor's essay lacks the broad scope, greater scale and conscious appeal of *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* - the general keen book-lover is unlikely to read it, tucked away in a journal as it is.

The true locus of *At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* becomes increasingly clear as Montresor continues; it is a source review of *Mulligan Stew* 'in keeping with Julia Kristeva's formal view of intertextuality'⁹⁰ and deeply concerned with Sorrentino's 'obsessive concern with formal structure'⁹¹ - the *modus operandi* of presentational media as a whole. Montresor's approach asks more of the reader than Elam's; especially as he moves further from the literal content of the three novels - understanding of Joyce and O'Brien in particular is assumed. General statements on postmodernism and postmodern 'parodists'⁹² are also made in the opening paragraphs, such as the image of a postmodernist's 'postromantic disdain for the very concept of originality.'⁹³ While compounded by several quotations from Montresor's three subjects, said subjects are purposefully selected writers whose work snugly fits Montresor's generalisation, rather than being fitting examples for a definition extrapolated from the huge, vague field of postmodern literature. Montresor reserves almost all of the (sliver of) grassroots knowledge

⁸² Sorrentino, G. *Mulligan Stew* (New York: Grove Press, 1979)

⁸³ Montresor, J. *Gilbert Sorrentino: At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* in *Modern Language Studies* 23(2) (New York: Modern Language Studies, 1993)

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Joyce, J. *Finnegan's Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939)

⁸⁶ O'Brien, F. *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Longman, 1939)

⁸⁷ Joyce, J. *Finnegan's Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939)

⁸⁸ O'Brien, F. *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Longman, 1939)

⁸⁹ Sorrentino, G. *Something Said* (Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001)

⁹⁰ Montresor, J. *Gilbert Sorrentino: At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* in *Modern Language Studies* 23(2) (New York: Modern Language Studies, 1993)

⁹¹ Sorrentino, G. *Something Said* (Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001)

⁹² Montresor, J. *Gilbert Sorrentino: At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* in *Modern Language Studies* 23(2) (New York: Modern Language Studies, 1993)

⁹³ Ibid

in the essay for Sorrentino. *Mulligan Stew* is, after all, being analysed over and above its predecessors, and while by utilising so many references his essay is still somewhat of a gateway text its reliance on its readership's prior knowledge of the area marks it apart from *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. If Elam's book is a front door, *At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* is an attic hatch that needs to be opened with a pole. However; once open it draws out and well-phrases many admittedly apparent observations with plentiful examples and insightful commentary.

These four texts are all clearly of significant value in the debate over presentational theatre, but their individual shortcomings must be understood. Brecht and Stanislavski's main goals are that of persuasion. Where Brecht rationalises Stanislavski seduces, but both speak of their own work with personal zeal and narrow-sighted energy. These texts must be assessed as the foundations of each side of the argument, but Stanislavski's reductiveness and Brecht's hypocrisy and ethnic discrimination render both in need of quite drastic reassessment. They are the most obvious choices to centre any case around, but must be heavily qualified if such a decision is made. Neither Elam or Montresor write on their own material, which explains their greater impartiality. The capitalist nature of *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* inflects much of the book; decisions of what to include, decisions of which assumptions to challenge and constraints on length are all made in order to make an excellent intermediate introduction to the field. How many sacrifices Elam made to satisfy his own criterion is impossible to say, and therefore his text should not be relied upon in isolation. Unlike Elam, Montresor is not trying to write a work of unprecedented format; the literary journal article he presents is typical in his delivery and its direction. His aims are the most placid of the four, but a lack of any of Brecht's electricity ultimately demarcates *At Swim in the Wake of His Gene Pool* as a synthesis of others' ideas, but a complex and worthwhile one. None of these four should be discounted in a discussion of the validity of presentational modes of expression.

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